

- **Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes**

- **FINAL**

- **September 29, 2010, 7:30 p.m.**

- **Chenery Community Room**

- Present: Chair Allison; Members Becker, Bruschi, Callanan, Epstein, Grob, Libenson, Lynch, Manjikian, McHugh, Millane, Sarno, Smith; BOS Chair Jones; School Committee Chair Rittenburg

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- [Member Dash arrived at 8:30 p.m.]

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- Town Administrator Younger and Town Accountant Hagg

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- Members Absent:

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- The meeting was called to order at 7:31 pm by Chair Allison.

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- Chair Allison began by reviewing the evening's agenda.

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- ***Presentation/Discussion of New Open Meeting Rules***

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- Member Lynch noted that he attended the Open Meeting Law (OML) meeting last Spring. The OML became effective on July 1, 2010. The new statute centralizes oversight in the Attorney General's office. The AG's office has the power to: void action, reinstate employees, and promulgate rules and regulations.

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- Member Lynch reviewed the key definitions, e.g., communication (what is considered and not considered a deliberation), exclusions to where the OML applies, and what defines a meeting. He explained how a Public Body is defined (formally referred to as Government Body).

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- Member Lynch outlined some of the new requirements including: notice required for a meeting, what is expected regarding minutes and documents, the list of topics that the Chair expects to be discussed (may or may not be an official agenda), and the posting requirements. (Meetings must be posted 48 hours in advance.)

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- The Executive Session minutes must include a summary of what was discussed, a list of votes, and what documents were used. When entering into Executive Session, the Chair must state what topic will be discussed. The minutes must be reviewed by the Chair and they must be made available to the public once the reason for privacy is no longer needed.

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- Member Lynch discussed Executive Session exemptions where OML would not apply (contract negotiations, litigation, collective bargaining). Conference calls would be

possible with the AG office's permission. OML requires a public statement by the Chair regarding use of video or audio recordings of the meetings.

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- Regarding enforcement, complaints must be filed in writing to the meeting body (WC, for example) within 30 days, and then the WC forwards the written complaint to the AG's office within 14 days. The AG's office will determine if there has been an OML violation. They will determine if the violation was intentional or unintentional and they may impose various penalties, including nullifying the action taken at the meeting, ordering training, and or fining the body.

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- Member Lynch highlighted the requirements for subcommittees, which include that Subcommittee Chairs must post notice of the meeting, topics to be discussed must be posted, and minutes will need to be taken (a summary of what was discussed, decisions made, action taken, record of votes, and documents need to be part of the minutes).

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- Chair Jones clarified that written documents are what is required and that electronic requirements are not sufficient. Member Bruschi added that if the entire budget is hard copied once, it does not need to be handed over each time it is discussed.

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- Regarding email, substantive discussions should not happen with a quorum (i.e., email *with* a quorum would constitute an Open Meeting).

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- ***Presentation/Discussion of Results of WC Self-Assessment and Department Evaluations***

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- Chair Allison noted that WC members completed a self-assessment and that also department heads assessed the WC.

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- First, she summarized the WC self-assessment highlights. Members felt that the WC is about the right size, that subcommittees are well organized and working well. Regarding fall meetings, structural changes could be addressed at the fall meetings. Materials provided could be provided earlier (perhaps by Tuesday). Regarding communication among BOS, SC, and WC, there was a sense that things could be improved here. It was suggested that all members of SC and BOS be added to the distribution list for minutes.

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- Regarding candidates for appointment to the WC, there was a consensus to have hardworking individuals. Some felt appointments should have a professional financial background, some wanted more Belmont-oriented appointments.

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- General comments included that the WC should make more materials (e.g. spreadsheets, etc.) available electronically, and that materials need to be disseminated earlier. Member Becker noted that electronic versions of documents would be appreciated by the public, as well. Chair Allison mentioned establishing "google groups" as a way to upload documents for the public.

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- Department Head evaluations on the process were collected anonymously. The feedback was honest and critical. Four major feedback points included: preparation, continuity, consistency, and materiality. There was a broad sense that some members of subcommittees had not prepared adequately. Regarding continuity, it was felt that time spent familiarizing members with their department is wasted if the subcommittee's membership is moved around. Regarding consistency, the example given is that a 2009 subcommittee focused on a set of questions, and in 2010 the questions and focus were completely different. Regarding materiality, some felt that questions were focused on small items and not items of consequence and leverage.

- The WC commented on the feedback. There was consensus that the subcommittee groups could meet "early and often" prior to meeting with department heads. Member Brusch offered a suggestion from the Capital Budget Committee of having questions sent out ahead time to department heads prior to the meeting. Member Lynch suggested that subcommittees could meet and then have a Chair's meeting (Chairs of subcommittees and Chair of WC) to review and discuss.

- BOS Chair Jones offered to share his 25-year perspective and give an overview of each subcommittee.

- Member McHugh asked whether the WC meets with department heads *after* the WC report is submitted in June, to follow up on the report. Chair Allison said that is an excellent question and a right question to ask.

- Chair Allison distributed the Subcommittee assignments for 2010/2011. She reviewed how the committees were formed: ones that required a lawyer, the necessary mix of experience, where placing new members seemed appropriate, etc. She also noted that, although the comments on the process were important to consider, Town Meeting had publicly commended the increased usefulness of the 2010 WC Report.

- She noted that the WC is scheduled to meet on most Wednesday evenings this fall, but that some meetings would set aside time for subcommittees to meet.

- ***Discussion of Budget Process / Program Budgeting Initiatives
FY2011 / WC Report FY2011***

- Chair Allison noted that the WC budget report is the principal written work product of the WC. The content, format, and structure of this report was discussed. Member Millane asked about the length of some sections, especially since the length varied so much from department to department. Perhaps, she suggested, a summary format could be used and this format could be more standardized. Member McHugh said the financial matrix should be standardized, as well. Member Epstein said he is working to make the report more standardized. Member Dash asked about an index. Perhaps an index of key words would be helpful.

- Chair Allison noted that the principal audiences for this report are Town Meeting (TM) — the WC is senior staff to TM — and the residents. Member Libenson suggested that the role of the WC subcommittee varies from department to department. Sometimes the WC function is analytic and sometimes the function is to provide oversight. Other times the WC is the catalyst to inform decision-makers to make a change.

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- ***Update on Progress of CPA Analysis***

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- Chair Allison reviewed the Modules sections and asked members to report on how the section is coming along. She noted that official reports will come next week. Members gave brief updates on the progress on their particular modules. In some cases questions were asked, and clarification provided.

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- Chair Allison modified Module 5, noting that the point was not to identify projects that the town might do, but rather identify the broad category of projects and their impact on operating costs and how that would impact the current operating budget.

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- Member Dash noted that there is an existing report that covers some of what these Modules seek to illuminate.

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- ***Approval of Minutes for 9/22/2010***

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- The minutes of September 22 were approved, with 2 abstentions.

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- BOS Chair Jones moved to adjourn at 9:25 pm.

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- ***[Wrap-up/Adjournment]***

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- [Member Bruschi reviewed what happened in the meeting: Member Lynch gave a presentation on the Open Meeting Laws, Chair Allison discussed the self assessment study, the structure of the WC report discussed, subcommittee assignments were handed out, the CPA Modules were revisited, and the minutes of 9/22/10 were approved.]

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- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio

- WC Recording Secretary

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